

Lessons Learned Record of Interview

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Ghani Era

- Interviewee remarks that their contacts in Afghanistan are relieved about the change in administration and view Ghani's ascension as an opportunity for change. Everyone's pretty happy with the change [in the Afghan government post-elections]. People on the ground are saying that all of the drama of the Karzai era is gone. You go into a meeting there's an agenda. There's a sense of direction. No one's hitting over the head about civilian casualties or foreign intervention or British colonialism. It's a very different vision of governance and doing business.
- But Ghani and company will need some time to adjust. Under Karzai a lot of people quickly got jobs and positions but weren't necessarily qualified. Ghani needs to find people to live and work in Kabul. On corruption some people see promise with the Kabul Bank case. On security, former ministers are out but what's next. There are issues with the ALP program getting mixed reviews. I'm not so optimistic on Resolute Support. It's a two year mission. So you have a German or Italian rotating out by June 2015 and everyone out by Jan. 2016. That gives you essentially only about three months where you're actually focused on training; the rest is focused on redeployment and exit.

Reconciliation

- The Germans don't really see [Ghani's] reconciliation plans as having much success. The Peace Council is dead. Taliban insist on change in government.

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Impressions of SRAP

- (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) initially I saw a lot of the benefits to the SRAP effort, but on the whole it was a negative. *Describes a conflict over authority between Holbrooke and major stakeholders.*
- With Holbrooke the way he envisioned it it was that he had absolute authority over the entire portfolio. He really manipulated the SCA Bureau and staff at State. Lute almost tore off Holbrooke's head. Holbrooke did what he could to manipulate the NSC. He would do this to draw in people from his circle from New York. They were smart people-Vali Nasr, Barney Rubin but they didn't know anything about running government. So you have people in the interagency sitting next to each other who were senior foreign service officers and people who had never worked in government giving orders. You cannot argue with Barney Rubin and Vali Nasr about Afghanistan or Shia-Sunni sectarian rivalries. But they had no idea how to get an idea from its raw form into policy and then implement it. These guys might as well be interns and they're jaded and they don't have the patience you need to push policy through a bureaucracy. So what you have is Holbrooke's trusted inner circle where the message wasn't brought in that all this had been tried before.
- With State staffers Holbrooke just thought of those people as boring diplomats. All of his whiz kids were the dynamic people. Some were close friends in the New York intellectual scene. He was chosen to head SRAP not because he was an Af Pak expert but because AfPak was a big problem.
- *References* friction with outgoing administration appointees like Assistant Secretary Richard Boucher where Holbrooke would have open arguments with their desk officer.
- Holbrooke is not confirmed by the Senate but there he is with the biggest portfolio in State. Holbrooke could appoint as many friends from New York as he wanted. *Talks about Ronin Farrow, formerly SRAP head of NGO liaisons and son of Mia Farrow, longtime dinner partner and friend from New York.* So there you had the desk officer who was the director for USAID who had 20 years of experience working under Ronin Farrow, who had never worked in government and hadn't been out of college more than a few years. And the view was the guy from State was just a boring old diplomat resistant to change.
- RE: SRAP Office: The model is not sustainable. Desk officers are supposed to develop regional experience throughout their career so they have a couple of languages and they continually rotate back to their area or region of specialization. By taking AfPak out of the SCA it disincentivizes the career track. You can be an AfPak expert but that doesn't mean it's a path that leads to anywhere else. You just don't have the career track for it because it's not connected to SCA.
- At one point there was an attempt to make sure that the SRAP had representation and a feedback loop to SCA. They would send (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) to the SCA meetings but it didn't result in much. It wasn't effective. They couldn't always go because of time constraints. You'd have people going to SCA meetings to hear about an election in Sri Lanka for three hours before getting to Afghanistan it's just not a priority.
- There is no shortage of special envoys or special reps at the State Department and some are quite effective. One that seemed to work well for instance was George Mitchell for NEA. But with the SRAP set up no one retained administrative control over the policy and planning. Things like who staffs an issue or a problem area were never addressed.
- All of the regional assistant secretaries have their senior advisers on issue areas and they are the go to people. For SCA you had a staff of 5-10 people. The SRAP set up created parallel

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structures and Holbrooke just didn't trust the non-partisanship of the foreign service officers, especially with the Pakistan experts. They were sent away.

- (When Holbrooke came in Feb.2009) The message was that you are all a bunch of Republican hacks and I'm here to fix it.

Secretary Clinton's Tenure:

- She's extremely popular in the foreign service. Whenever she was on the ground in Afghanistan or Pakistan she was really well received. She gave Holbrooke the post in part because of his experience in the Balkans but also because of longstanding ties with the Clinton team. But when Holbrooke passed away it was over. There was a sense that it hadn't worked and the long search for his replacement began with the understanding that the position would be rescaled. You got Grossman who was not at the top of the list then Dobbins who was good but he was not as energetic. Neither Clinton nor Kerry wanted someone as powerful as Holbrooke again.
- Grossman's line was: 'I'm not here to count pomegranates.' His main brief was dealing with reconciliation, focusing on Guantanamo transfers and a limited ceasefire or some sort of positive statements on something from Quetta.

Regarding Feldman:

- Dan Feldman is not a regional expert. He's there to talk about anti-corruption during and after the transition.

Summary Points:

Regarding development:

- Development originally not high on the agenda, but once we got there, we realized we couldn't walk away, but we were then focusing on Iraq.
- Very slow to get off the ground, and the emphasis at the beginning was humanitarian as refugees began flooding back in 2002. Development was secondary to the humanitarian effort.
- The extractive industry was too remote, and required infrastructure that was not there. There was also little to no indigenous skillset for this type of work.
- Many educated returnees who are not being utilized, and not many are founding start-ups- they didn't have models for it

Regarding U.S. Legacy in Afghanistan

- We didn't have our heart in it; no one came away saying we did a great job
- Schools were symbolic; now they're falling down
- Compared to the ghost town in 2001 with no functioning government, Afghanistan today is thriving in comparison. But the country still does not have many comparative advantages
- In areas like textile where Afghanistan could have a comparative advantage, forty-five percent of people who could work in this area are not working at all.
- Women on provincial councils are proof of what can happen when women are given this type of opportunity. Women on PCs are sharper than their male counterparts

Regarding work with INR

- (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) The advantage was that the 4 South Asia staffers had a combined 45 years of experience living and working in the region.

Regarding Afghanistan 2005-2007:

- All major policy decisions on Afghanistan made at the White House and Pentagon, not State
- Turning point came at the end of 2005-2006 when we realized the insurgency could make us fail, yet our strategy militarily remained the same until 2009
- From 2005-2007, Iraq was all we could handle. We were just drifting in Afghanistan.
- Alarm bells were going off in 2005 that insurgency was much bigger than we ever expected, but Washington's focus remained trained on the 2004/5 elections.